



UNDER FIRE

RICHARD PARKER
BASED ON THE DRAMA
OF ROY COOPER MEGRUE
AUTHOR OF "UNDER COVER" AND "CO-AUTHOR OF 'IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE'"
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SYNOPSIS.

Georgy Wagstaff, daughter of Sir George, of the British admiralty, hints at a liaison between her governess, Ethel Willoughby, and Henry Streetman. Ethel denies it. Henry Streetman calls on Ethel and while waiting for her talks to Brewster, Sir George's butler, who is a German spy, about his failure to get at admiralty papers in Sir George's possession. He phones to German secret service headquarters. Streetman, the German spy, and Roeder (alias Brewster, the butler) are discussing the possibility of war. When Ethel appears he tries to force her to get from Sir George knowledge of the sailing orders to the British fleet. Though she believes him a French instead of a German spy, she refuses until he threatens her. She begs him to announce their secret marriage, as Georgy is suspicious, but he puts her off. At tea Georgy and her lover, Guy Falconer, tease Sir George, and Streetman makes an awkward attempt to talk politics.

You can imagine, perhaps, the sort of furore that would be kicked up by the entrance of a breezy, slangy, talkative, well-informed American newspaper reporter into a typical high-class English tea party, and of his effect upon a situation exceedingly tense—when he plunges into a discussion of possible war which the party has been trying to avoid. Read about Charlie Brown of New York in this installment.

Streetman, the German spy, Sir George Wagstaff, British naval official, Ethel Willoughby, secret wife of Streetman, and others are having tea at the Wagstaff home. The party is discussing a play.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

"You really ought to see the play, Sir George," the irrepressible Guy remarked. He was always ready to back up Georgy in any devilry she might embark upon.

"Yes! It deals with our next war," that young lady added.

"As if a playwright knew anything of that!" her father scoffed.

"It's horribly insulting to us Britons," Mrs. Falconer remarked.

"Drives in a lot of home truths and gives us English a fearful ragging!" Guy added cheerfully.

Sir George looked at him somewhat

"Wrote it? Bernard Shaw?" he inquired. And there was much reproof in his tone. To him, Shaw was like a red rag to a bull.

"I don't know who wrote it," Georgy said carelessly. "I never can remember the beasts' names."

"It seemed to me to present a very striking picture of what may very likely happen," Henry Streetman interposed.

Mrs. Falconer turned to him in astonishment. She did not think that anyone in his senses could have taken that silly play seriously.

"You don't mean you really believe there is going to be war right over there on the continent?" she exclaimed.

"I do, rather! And I fancy Sir George agrees with me—don't you, Sir George?" the wily Streetman ventured. He was determined that if he did not succeed in forcing Sir George's hand he would at least give him a run for his money.

Sir George looked bored.

"Really, sir, I should prefer not to discuss that matter," he said once more.

Georgy laughed gayly.

"When father puts on his mantle of dignity like that, it means serious business," she observed. And there was a deal of truth in her statement, frivolous as she seemed. But Georgy was no fool. She had not lived with her father close upon eighteen years for nothing. She knew unerringly how to interpret his every manner.

"But why should there be war, even if an Austrian duke did get killed by some Serbian or other?" Mrs. Falconer asked. "Of course I've only seen the headlines," she hastened to add, to disclaim any such plebeian pastime as the reading of newspapers.

"Behind that assassination there is much of international politics and diplomacy," Sir George explained. "In fact, it's rather a long story."

"Then, father, don't tell it!" his sarcastic daughter bantered. Her plea, however, was entirely superfluous. Sir George had not the slightest intention of committing such an indiscretion. But Guy Falconer was ready enough to air his opinions.

"Oh, it's not just Austria and Serbia!" he said confidently. "The trouble is that Germany is patting Austria on the back, and whispering, 'Don't give in, old lady! And Russia is saying, 'Serbia, old girl, you're dead right. We'll back you.' And there you are!"

"Georgy—you're not having any tea," Ethel observed.

"Oh! I don't want any. If I did, I'd ask for it," Miss Wagstaff said.

"Tea, mother?" Guy inquired of his doting parent. Their discussion of the subject uppermost in the minds of all had driven even the important matter of tea completely out of his mind.

"None for me, thanks!" Mrs. Falconer replied. "I've quite outgrown it—ever since I came back from the States." The others looked agast at

her astounding confession. To thoroughgoing Britishers such a remark borders close upon lese majeste.

And then Brewster announced another caller.

"Mr. Charles Brown," he pronounced in his best manner—a somewhat superfluous statement, perhaps, because all of Brewster's manners were of the best.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Brown of New York.

In another moment a slight, wiry man, well along in the thirties, came breezily into the room. The first glance told that he was an American. His nervous alertness, his assurance, the slightly slouchy but nevertheless aggressive manner in which he held himself, differentiated him unmistakably from the other men in Ethel's sitting room.

Guy rose to greet him. He had invited the American to join the party, for Guy was almost like one of Sir George's family.

"Hello, Charlie!" he exclaimed with undoubted enthusiasm.

And straightway he introduced the newcomer to Ethel Willoughby, to whom, as hostess, Guy infallibly turned first.

"You remember my mother?" Guy asked him then.

"You bet I do!" Mr. Brown said heartily as he shook hands with that smiling lady. "Didn't we have a bully time in Chinatown?"

"Rather!" Mrs. Falconer replied; and they both laughed over their reminiscence.

To Henry Streetman the American bowed pleasantly enough. And toward Sir George he displayed the utmost affability.

"Glad to know you, Sir George," he said as he gripped his hand. "I want to warn you, though, in case the others haven't, that I'm a newspaper man—a journalist, I think you say over here."

"You do frighten me," Sir George replied with a twinkle in his eye. "I've rather a terror of your profession, especially when they come from the States."

Charlie Brown grinned at him.

"Don't worry, Sir George!" Guy interposed. "Charlie's a good fellow."

"Father's only spoofing you," Georgy assured the reporter.

"Spoofing? Spoofing?" Mr. Brown repeated in a somewhat bewildered fashion. He had met many words, during his short stay in London, that he had never before encountered in the English language.

But his quick mind was not long at fault. "Oh, sure! Kidding—that's it!"

But, Sir George, I don't blame you. We do butt in a good deal into things that don't actually concern us or the public, but I happen to belong to a newspaper where it isn't a crime for one of its staff to act like a gentleman; so don't think I'm making mental notes or that you have to put

up with me."

"You know, I think Charlie's right," Guy said.

"Go on, Mr. Brown!" Georgy said, impatient at the interruption.

"Don't you think Germany can defeat both France and Russia?" Streetman demanded.

"Maybe—maybe!" Charlie Brown said. "But with England on their side—"

Streetman did not wait for him to finish.

"England, with a civil war in Ulster on her hands, wouldn't dare—" he began heatedly.

And then Mr. Brown interrupted him. He had not the slightest intention of being browbeaten by anybody. And there was a vague antagonism in Streetman's manner toward him that roused him mightily.

"Civil war!" he exclaimed. "Why, if England has a scrap with Germany, that Ulster trouble will stop in ten minutes; and every Irishman that goes to the front will lick three Germans—maybe four. . . . I've seen the Irish mix things up in New York."

Streetman subsided, for the moment, beneath that avalanche of words.

"And you think Germany is quite prepared to face those odds?" Ethel Willoughby asked the American.

"Not intentionally," he replied. "The Germans have got everything down so pat in theory that nothing can stop them; but God help 'em if their theories don't work." There was no mistaking where Brown's sympathies lay. For, though he had not by words expressed his real feelings in the matter at issue, there was a fervent ring in his voice that sufficiently betrayed his sentiments.

Meanwhile Henry Streetman regarded him with extreme disfavor. Perhaps for the moment, among all those enemies, he momentarily forgot that his interests required that he should by no means appear to hold any opinions that one might not expect in the most insular of the English.

"It seems a pity," he said, "but Germany is the only nation in the world that is ready—absolutely ready. She is the only nation that can risk a war with any chance of victory."

His companions looked at him in astonishment. And Sir George Wagstaff even was stirred out of the attitude of apathy that he was wont to assume.

"Oh! Just snooping around! The

paper thought they needed a spy in their London news, and I needed one, so I came over."

"It must be very interesting," Ethel Willoughby observed. She was more than interested in Guy's friend. His sort was new to her, and though his breeziness might not have been considered quite good form in an Englishman, it was a quality which the British find both refreshing and entertaining in an American.

"It is interesting," Charlie Brown told her. "But you sound as if you were going to interview me; and for the love of Mike—don't!"

"Who is Mike?" Sir George inquired innocently, in his endeavor to grasp the intricacies of Mr. Brown's conversation.

"Oh, he's an Irishman we Americans swear by," the newspaper man replied. "Fancy that! How odd!" Mrs. Falconer exclaimed. She did not know that Mr. Brown was spoofing—now.

"Since you're a newspaper man you must know everything," said Georgy Wagstaff. She quite fancied the stranger; and she wanted to know him better.

"Well, at least I try to convince my editor of that," he replied.

"Then tell us about the war! We're very ignorant. We only read the headlines," she said. "Father won't talk. It'd be a breach of something or other."

"Do tell us your opinion, Mr. Brown!" Ethel urged. "We're all so 'fourth-terested.'"

"I suppose I can talk w—" Sir George can't—and I do love to talk," Brown admitted. No one knew his pet failing any better than himself.

"Silent Charlie—that's what they call him!" Guy informed the others delightedly.

"You don't mind, Sir George?" The American turned inquiringly to Sir George Wagstaff.

"Naturally not!" the older man assented good-naturedly. "As you said, this is only a private tea party."

"Then please do!" Georgy insisted. "If you don't, Guy will!" She dearly loved to rag her devoted admirer.

"Away!" Brown declaimed in mock satisfaction at being able to scatter his opinions broadcast. "Well, I'll tell you. While most of you Londoners have been wondering whether the Irish are going to start a civil war, or whether Gunboat Smith did foul Carpenter, I've been digging up some inside dope, and, believe me, there's going to be a merry old bust-up. Russia, I know, is mobilizing; and so is Germany."

"But can Russia, with her internal conditions, afford to fight?" Streetman asked him.

"I don't know whether she can afford to or not," Charlie Brown said. "But I believe she is going to."

"I take it you are not particularly informed on Russia," Streetman retorted, somewhat acidly.

"Oh, yes I am!" the undaunted Brown replied. "I know it's awfully far there, and that they drink vodka, and have revolutions, and send their prisoners to Siberia, and apart from that I'm pretty darned sure Russia's going to fight." Words habitually flowed from Charlie Brown's mouth without the slightest effort. It is so with bores. But Mr. Brown was far from being a bore. What saved him was the fact that he always said something well worth listening to.

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